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The Workshop

A Monthly Journal, devoted to Progress of the Useful Arts.

EDITED BY
I. SCHNORR AND OTHERS.

VOL. V.

NO. 6.

THE LION AS AN ART-SUBJECT.

By CONSTANTINE UHDE.

In the monuments of the past centuries, as well as in the edifices of the present age, sculpture and painting have always gone hand in hand with architecture. The three sister arts have mutually supplemented each other in the embodiment of any one idea. Sculpture has almost limited itself to the representation of man, the ideal of creation, and thus to reproduce the glory of a nation by the statues of its heroes.

It might naturally be expected that men would introduce their ever faithful companions in life, the horse and the dog, together with themselves, into the sphere of artistic representation, or, at all events, offer them a place, even if but a subordinate one, in the ornamental appointments of their buildings; but it is not so. The horse is seldom found as an independent statue, like the four beautiful bronze horses which are to be seen over the porch of the Church of S. Mark at Venice. In general the purpose of the horse is simply to impart elevation and dignity to the rider.

And the dog is, with still fewer exceptions, banished from plastic art. Sometimes indeed, it is found as a guardian on the graves of the dead. This negligence in the reproduction of these two domestic animals might subject man to the charge of ingratitude, were it not that the form both of the horse and dog present insuperable artistic difficulties in the way of bringing them into harmony with other forms, particularly ornamental ones, or of producing them independently by themselves as works of art.

How difficult is it for example, if not indeed almost impossible, to represent the strongly built body, neck and head of the horse in harmonious proportion with its slender and elegant legs. In proof of this, we may point to the chariots and horses on the Brandenburg

gate at Berlin, on the Duke of Brunswick's palace, and on the triumphal arches at Milan and Paris, in all of which, the legs viewed against the light, seem much too thin in comparison with the thickly framed bodies to which they belong.

The horse is therefore more favorably represented in relief or profile, as for example in the Panathenian festal procession on the walls of the Parthenon. Here the different parts do not strike one as so offensively out of proportion. But to represent the horse in relief and *en face* belongs to the category of the impossible, by reason of the great distance between its hind and fore quarters. However beautiful the lines may be in the form of the horse, it is nevertheless difficult to interweave them ornamentally with scrolls and tendrils etc., for the thick and comparatively long limbs correspond but ill, if at all, with the soft involutions of the running ornament.

What we have here advanced with respect to the horse is still more applicable to the dog, which is, far from possessing the beauty of form which we admire in the former, and is destitute of that graceful tournure of limb which is absolutely necessary for ornamental purposes.

But out of the animal creation, man has selected one, which by its exterior, its whole appearance on the stage of nature, has something magnificent, royal and fearful in itself, one which seems almost a too powerful adversary of man, and which, by its form and the proportions of its different limbs may be called the ideal of the animal world. The lion (fig. 1) has been by universal consent raised to the dignity of the king of beasts, and endued by tradition with powerful mental qualities, such as courage and generosity, and made almost equal to man himself; and however far back we trace the

history of man, we find the lion represented on the monuments of every epoch.

But whether the artists, who, from olden time, have taken in hand the representation of the royal animal, have not frequently and in many different ways been guilty of leze-majesty towards him, is a question which we propose to examine in the present article.

The generality of artists may plead some excuse for their ignorance of the subject they treat, for in very few cases indeed have they had the lion itself for a model. Such also is the case with the writer of these lines, who must however console himself with the verdict of Scheitlins, that among the innumerable presentments of the lion not one is perfect. He adds too that no artist has satisfactorily caught his noble and intellectual expression. The picture of a butterfly is easily reproduced, that of the lion is perhaps impossible. The butterfly has doubtless its peculiar idiosyncratic physiognomy, only it escapes our observation; the lion must be treated on the same footing as man. He is a man among the brutes, just as there are brutes among men.

„The lion is the king of the beasts of prey, the first in order of the whole genus of mammalia. He is easily to be distinguished from all other of the feline tribe. The characteristics are the strongly framed powerful body, with the short, unicolored hair, the broad face with its small eyes, the lordly mane which covers his shoulders and the tassel which adorns his tail.

„A royal mantle doth invest
The lion's noble mane and breast.
A royal crown, so wondrous fair,
Formed by his brow and bristly hair.

„The lion of Barbary is the one which, from the most ancient time has been celebrated for his courage, his cunning and strength, his heroic magnanimity and his dignified serenity, and has received the title of the king of beasts. He is indeed the strongest, most courageous and most celebrated of all beasts of prey, the most powerful of the genus felis, the most dangerous and savage of all his fellows. His every look and movement impresses us with the idea of his invincible strength, his self-confidence and assurance of victory in combat. „His hinder part is somewhat raised, the head still more so, his look is majestic and his whole deportment dignified and awe inspiring. Every thing about him evinces his nobleness, every movement is measured and full of dignity, his body and soul are in the most perfect harmony.

This brief notice plainly proves with what good reason the lion was from the most ancient times, assigned the highest place among animals; how heroes thought it an honor to be compared with him; how the lion hunt was a royal amusement; how, in another point of view he became the emblem of solitude, how this mightiest of the animals became the guardian of places held sacred by men; how he watched before the graves of departed heroes, and the churches and temples of the people, how he guards the statues of great warriors, and

so, as in the Nelson monument at London, represents the whole nation; how the sleeping lion becomes the emblem of the fallen warrior after mortal combat; how the lion supports the pulpit whence the powerful word of God is published; how old royal families, and free cities adopt him as the symbol of strength and place him in their armorial bearings. In short, there is an innumerable multitude of symbolical meanings to which he corresponds according to the several natures and periods in which the emblem occurs.

We remarked at the outset, that in the employment of animal figures in art, we are often met with insurmountable difficulties; but the lion is a notable exception, since his very shape facilitates the artist's application of it both in independent and subordinate artistic representations, and in this regard also, by his ideal and noble form, may the lion be designated as the king of beasts.

The symmetrical proportion of all his limbs, the delicately rounded movements of his whole frame, the elasticity of the lines, which are in perfect harmony in every position, whether lying, standing or sitting, as well as in the act of taking his spring, enable the artist to employ his whole form in the most varied positions, of every one of which we may cite illustrious examples.

The sleeping lion of Thorwaldsen at Lucerne; the lions couchant on the Nelson column at London by Landseer; the sitting lion of the Pyraeus, at present before the arsenal at Venice; the four marching lions harnessed to the chariot in the Victory gate at Munich by Halbig; the springing and fighting lions in the Assyrian lion hunt from the ruins of Nineveh; and lastly the mortally wounded lion prostrate on his back by Wolff in the group before the old Museum at Berlin all are proofs of the noble and magnificent effect produced by the representation of his majestic figure. But not only is his entire body independently reproduced in art, but the several parts also, as for example the lion's paw as the foot for tables. More generally however, the lion's head is used as the epitome of his superior qualities, and, by reason doubtless of its definite and graceful form, is found in every age: often indeed in modern times, merely on account of its being so easily employed without any logical importance, it is seen in every possible application, and the majestic animal is even trodden under foot, being a frequent motive for carpets.

Our article would extend to too great a length were we to consider the lion in his whole figure; we will therefore confine ourselves to the examination of the further treatment of the head in the different art epochs, noticing at the same time the different symbolisms it is intended to embody.

We may admit in general that the most perfect artistic forms of this majestic animal are to be found where a knowledge of it by actual observation might be presupposed. Consequently the most beautiful specimens are to be met with in southern countries, among the Assyrians, Greeks and Romans, while in the middle

ages, when civilisation took a northward direction, the form of the lion was sadly outraged.

It was not until the Renaissance period and the present time, that the countries of the North, through the growing intercourse with the South, were enabled to study the lion in Menageries or Zoological gardens, and so, taking into account the naturalistic tendency of the day, we of the present age have also produced some very excellent specimens.

From the representations which were discovered on the alabaster slabs of the Royal palace at Nineveh (fig. 2) the lion hunt was a favorable pastime of the kings and nobles of Assyria. The hunters are riding in chariots harnessed with swift horses and wounding the lion with arrows and javelins. Probably even in those times there existed lion preserves, or lion parks, such as Indian princes possess at present, and as the rich among ourselves have their deer preserves and wild boar parks.

But the lion had also its symbolical signification for the Assyrians. The Goddess Beltis, the Juno, or Venus of the Assyrians was represented standing on a lioness, as was also the Egyptian deity Ken. The head of a lioness was also given to Paiht, another Egyptian deity. The Assyrians composed for themselves a being gifted with divine qualities, whom they represented as a gigantic winged lion with a human head, symbolising the intellect of man, united to the strength of the lion and the omnipresence of God.

In the excavations at Nineveh, Layard discovered under the statue of a winged Bull 16 lions couchant in copper, of different sizes (fig. 3), wonderfully executed, with a handle on the back of each, used probably as standard weights.

The Assyrian lions are distinguished by their grand and highly conventional execution, and though they differ in several points from the natural type, an exact acquaintance with the original is shown by the characteristic and majestic curve of the lines of the body, as well as in the expression of the head. The mane, from which the head protrudes as from an overcoat, is regular and not unlike sharp scales. The ears springing out of the mane are curled at the edges. The eyes have too a human expression. The jaw is opened wide even when the lion is in repose (fig. 4).

In contrast to these representations, all of which betoken life and motion, the Egyptian lions breathe only repose, and a conventionality under which the original is hardly to be recognised. The mane is transformed into

an almost modern collar, so that the lions have more the appearance of the female. The eyes are small, the jaw tightly closed.

With the Greeks, the lion figures, though conventionalised, adhere more to the true and free original form, and are used in very different ways. Sometimes as watchers, as for example the two lions facing one another on the City gate of Mycene. The remains of twenty lions sitting in an upright posture have been found near the tomb of king Mausolus of Caria, in Halicarnassus, guarding the place of his rest.

The tradition of the labors of Hercules shows also that the Greeks entertained great reverence for the strength of the lion, as is proved by the many different representations, which have come down to us of the hero in the act of strangling the Nemæan lion.

On the friese of the choragic monument of Lysicrates at Athens, we see the youthful Bacchus sitting and playing fearlessly with a lion.

Again the gem of Protarchos in Florence shows a Cupid playing the lyre, seated on a tranquilly stepping lion which is harnessed with music. Lions on the graves of the brave were not uncommon in Greece. The tomb of Leonidas is adorned with one, and after the decisive battle of Cheronæa, in which the liberties of Greece perished, the Thebans erected a colossal lion in marble over the grave of their fallen hero, as a memorial of his unsuccessful heroism. Some fragments of this are still extant. At the entrance of the arsenal at Venice is an upright Grecian lion of extraordinary beauty, which General Morosini carried off from the Piræus. It is distinguished by an entirely naturalistic treatment of the head, and by its grand and majestic features, though it must be acknowledged that the upright posture is by far the least advantageous, on account of the hind quarters of the lion being proportionally small.

The single lion heads of Grecian art are much more highly conventionalised; they are of frequent occurrence as waterspouts on the eaves of several temples, on the Parthenon for example (fig. 6), and the temple of Selinunt in Sicily (fig. 7). By reason of the immediate architectonic connexion between the lions' heads and the other parts of a building, it was necessary that the former should so far depart from nature, that the free lines of the mane should give way to a stiffer form, and the hair of the beard, and between the upper lip and the nose transformed into the appearance of ornament.

(To be continued in the next number.)

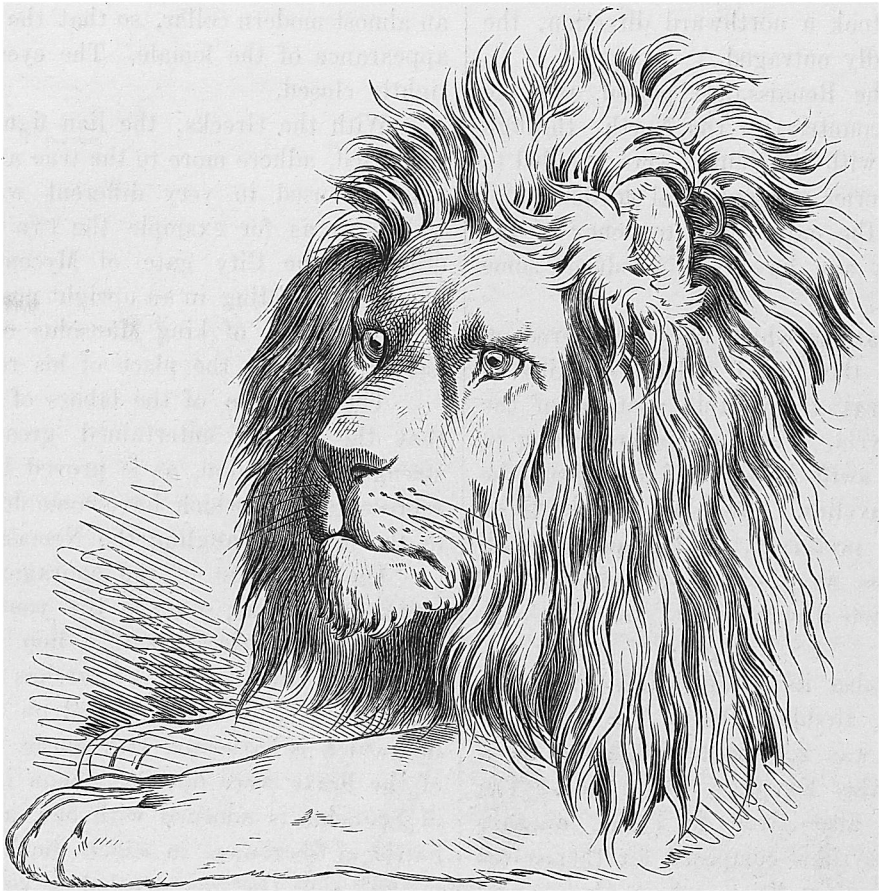


Fig. 1.



Fig. 4.

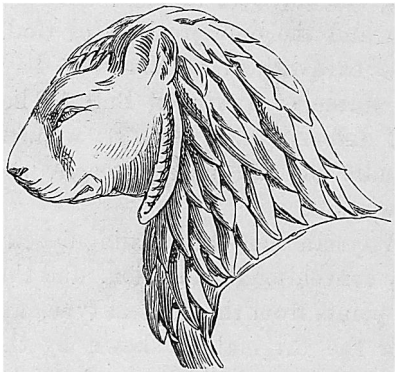


Fig. 2.

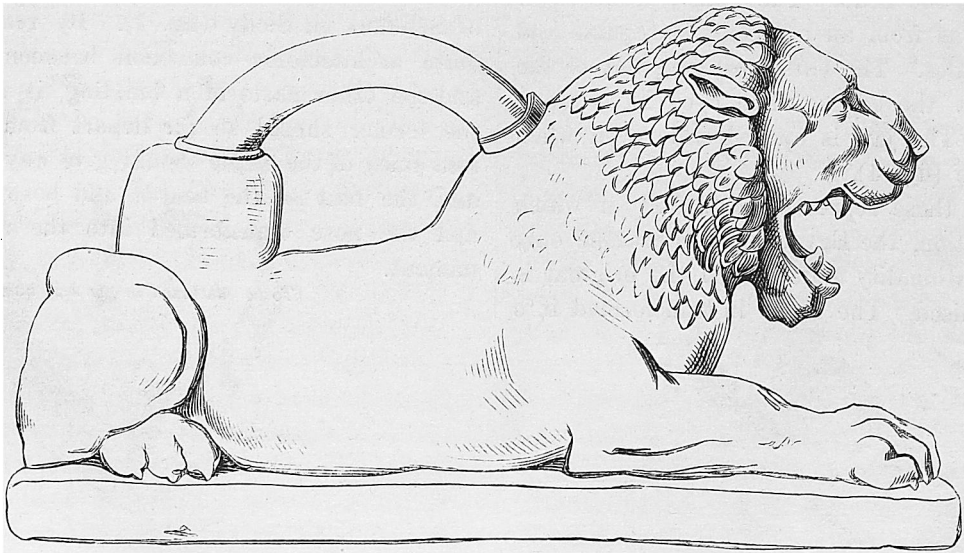


Fig. 3.

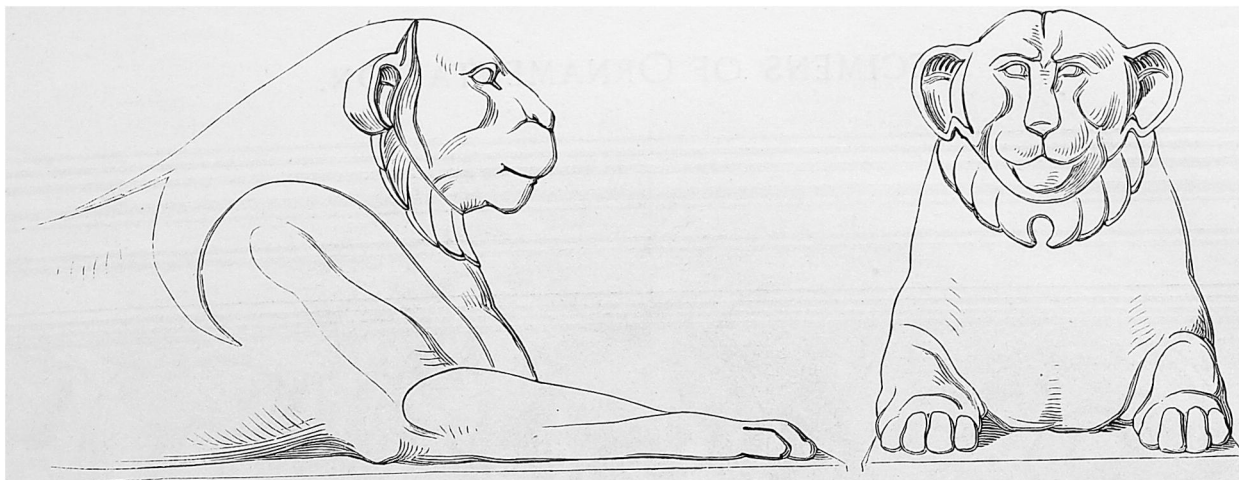


Fig. 5.

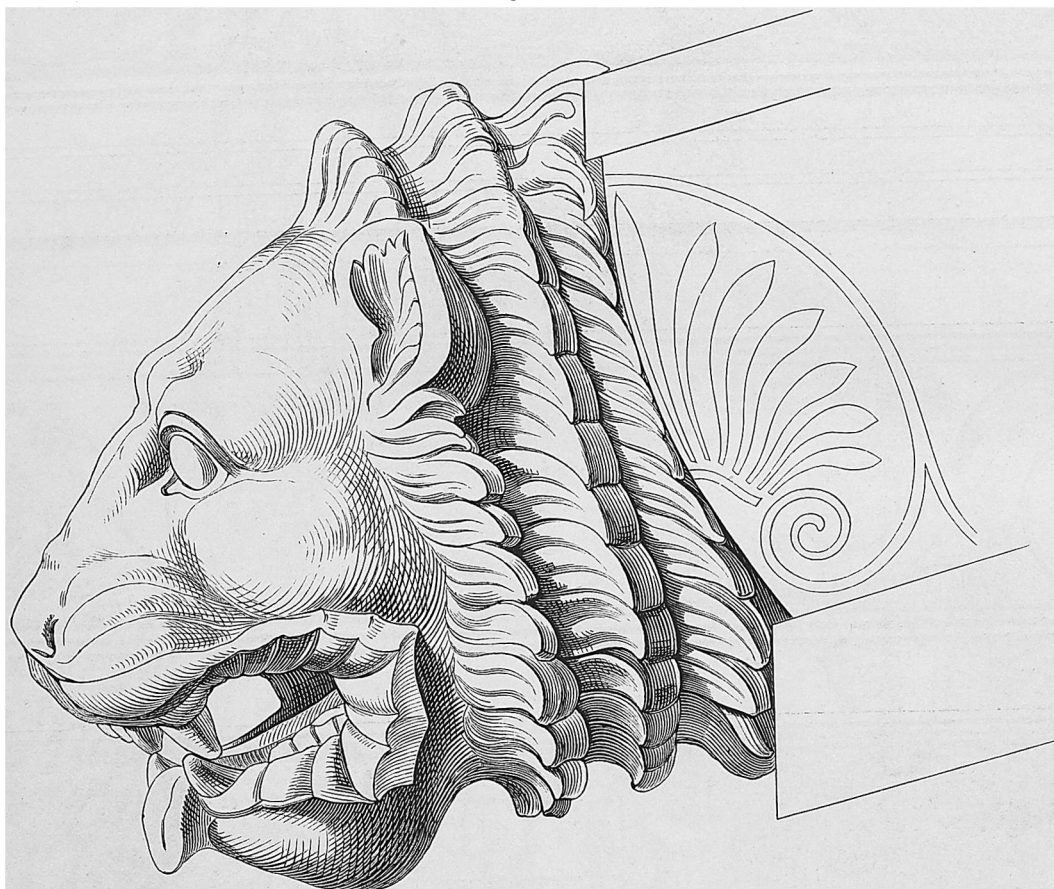


Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 7.